

VZCZCXYZ0004  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHRB #0360/01 0541809  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 231809Z FEB 07  
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5918  
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 4331  
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 3430  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 9217  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 5657  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3235  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 4544  
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 2712

UNCLAS RABAT 000360

SIPDIS

SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE

STATE FOR NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MO](#)  
SUBJECT: MOROCCO: ELECTION DATE SET, REDISTRICTING PLAN  
MOVES FORWARD

REF: RABAT 266

1. (U) This cable is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

2. (SBU) Summary: The GOM announced on February 22 that elections for the lower house of parliament will be staged on September 7. Most political parties, including those from the majority who supported a July ballot, have been generally supportive of the government's decision, citing the potential for increased voter participation. The Islamist PJD and mainly Berber UMP, who have advocated for a September vote all along, have been predictably pleased with the chosen date. The MOI has also announced it will revise voter rolls, thought to be riddled with bad entries, in April and May. At the same time, the council of government adopted an MOI-drafted electoral districting plan, which increases the total number of voting constituencies from 91 to 95. No consensus has yet emerged on the political implications of the new district boundaries. The plan, however, must still be passed by the council of ministers and parliament before being finalized. The September election date extends opportunities for the U.S. Mission to pursue election-related advocacy, assistance, and programming. End Summary.

Government Nails Down Election Date  
-----

3. (SBU) After months of speculation and rumor surrounding the date for Morocco's next legislative election, Minister of Interior Chakib Benmoussa, following the February 22 council of government meeting, publicly announced that Moroccans will head to the polls on September 7 to elect 325 members to the chamber of representatives, the lower house of parliament. (Note: Members of the lower house of parliament are elected to five-year terms. 295 representatives are elected from local party lists, while 30 representatives are elected from a national list -- informally reserved for women. End Note.) Nabil Benabdallah, government spokesperson and Minister of Communication, explained that the government's decision to hold election in September was the direct result of consultations and consensus among the MOI and the full range of political parties. Although widely debated in the local press and among political observers for the past several months, the reactions from political parties, members of parliament, and the press to the government's decision have been generally supportive.

¶4. (SBU) Despite initially favoring a July date, (reftel) because of the impending start of Ramadan and the beginning of the school year in September, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) and other ruling coalition parties have not publicly criticized the government's decision. Several leaders of smaller parties who also favored a July election, including Abdellah Kadiri of the National Democratic Party (PND) and Thami El Khyari of the Democratic Forces Front (FFD), have implicitly expressed their support for the September date arguing that it could allow for greater voter participation. Nonetheless, other political parties, such as the ruling coalition's Party for Progress and Socialism (PPS), still contend that a July date is more advantageous for Morocco because it will increase voter turnout. Similarly, the Islamist Party for Justice and Development (PJD) and the mainly Berber Popular Movement Union (UMP), have advocated for a September election all along. PJD Secretary General Saadeddine Ohtmani was quoted February 23

SIPDIS

in the French-language daily Aujourd'hui Le Maroc as saying that the September 7 date is most appropriate because it provides more time for political parties to mobilize voters.

¶5. (SBU) According to French-language accounts of the council of government decisions, an exceptional revision of the electoral lists (voter rolls) to be used in this year's elections will take place between April 5 and May 24. (NB: There is widespread belief among political observers that the electoral lists are out of date and rampant with double listings, deceased voters, and false registrations.) The MOI also released several key dates relating to the procedural framework of the elections. Official submissions of candidacies will take place between August 17 and August 24, while the official election campaign period will start August 25 and will run through September 6, according to press

reports.

#### Electoral Districting Plan Adopted

¶6. (SBU) At the same time, the February 22 council of government meeting also passed a new plan that revises the electoral districts relating to September's election. The new plan increases the total number of voting constituencies from 91 to 95. This change ostensibly reflects shifts in demographics since the 2002 elections, as well as the remapping of Morocco's administrative map since 2002, which includes mergers of some provinces and the creation of others. No consensus has yet emerged on the political implications of the new district boundaries. (NOTE: The 30 national list seats are not affected by the government's districting plan. End Note.) Although passed by the council of government, the districting plan must still be approved by the council of ministers (chaired by the king), then pass through both houses of parliament before being finalized. With that in mind, there is still space for amendments to the current plan (though none are currently expected).

#### COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) The government's decision for a September ballot, while providing political parties more time to prepare, also provides a greater opportunity for the Mission's election-related advocacy, assistance and programming to resonate with political parties and voters. With the date of the lower house elections now decided, political parties can refocus their attention internally on preparing effective campaigns platforms, developing strategies to increase voter participation, and improving party image among perspective voters. End Comment.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

\*\*\*\*\*

Riley